

COVID-19 Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force Act

Senator Kamala D. Harris

Early data indicates that COVID-19 is disproportionately infecting and killing minorities across the nation. In New York City, for example, initial reports reveal the virus is twice as deadly for Black and Latino people compared to white people. In New Mexico, Native Americans make up 10% of the population but more than one-third of the state's cases. In Chicago, where Black individuals make up one-third of the population, they represent more than half of the city's positive cases and nearly three-quarters of the deaths. And preliminary data from California reveals that Pacific Islanders have the highest positive case rate per 100,000 people, about three and a half times the state's average.

These numbers are staggering, sobering, and unsurprising. They reflect long-standing inequities in our health care system, including that Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders are more likely to be uninsured and have underlying health conditions that can exacerbate COVID-19. These inequities are further exacerbated by the fact that minorities make up a disproportionate share of frontline workers, are more likely to live in crowded multigenerational homes, and face persistent bias in our health care system.

Senator Harris is introducing the COVID-19 Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force Act to bring together health care and other policy experts, community-based organizations, and federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial leaders to confront the racial and ethnic disparities of this pandemic head on. The task force would build on the crucial demographic data collection measures recently passed by Congress and ensure data-driven recommendations to combat racial and ethnic disparities in our nation's COVID-19 response.

The COVID-19 Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force would:

- Provide weekly resource allocation recommendations to FEMA and Congress including:
 - Data on patient outcomes including hospitalizations, ventilation, and mortality disaggregated by race and ethnicity.
 - Identification of communities that have high levels of racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death rates.
 - Recommendations to FEMA about how best to allocate critical COVID-19 resources like PPE, ventilators, testing kits, testing supplies, vaccinations (when available), staffing, and funding to these communities.
 - Best practices when communities are able to effectively reduce racial and ethnic disparities.
- Provide oversight and recommendations to federal agencies about how to disburse COVID-19 relief funds—for instance, the Education Stabilization Fund and the Paycheck Protection Program created under the CARES Act—to address racial and ethnic disparities with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Report to Congress on:
 - Structural inequalities preceding the COVID-19 pandemic and how they contributed to racial and ethnic disparities in infection, hospitalization, and death rates.
 - The initial federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on racial and ethnic disparities in infection, hospitalization, and death rates.
 - Recommendations to combat racial and ethnic disparities in future infectious disease response.
- At the end of the COVID-19 public health crisis, establish a permanent Infectious Disease Racial Disparities Task Force to continue to identify and address racial and ethnic disparities in our health care system and improve future infectious disease response.